

The Builder.

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N more than one occasion we have urged our young readers to lose no opportunity, during the long days, of seeing such works of nature and of art as are accessible to them. We have said, and we say again, see all the finest buildings, and the grandest views, and the best pictures you can get at: by accustoming the eye to what is good, it will be gradually led to reject what is bad. When you have a leisure day get off to some of the old churches near you, or to one of our cathedrals, and fill your note-book and your sketch-book with records of what you see and what you think: such jaunts invigorate the body, give tone to the mind, and enlarge the store of materials on which it may afterwards work. Professionally, too, it is of the utmost importance that we should see what the best masters of our art have done, so that we may begin where they have left off. The dwarf on the giant's shoulders sees farther than the giant. "In every pursuit of art or science," said the late Sir Martin Shee, in one of his addresses to the Academy, "it is essential that we should, as early as possible, make ourselves acquainted with what has been done by those who have preceded us in the same career. If we neglect this, we invariably over-estimate our attainments;—we forfeit all the advantages which result from the accumulated experience of ages, and fancy that we have made great progress in our journey before we have achieved even its first stage.

"In the arts of imitation, particularly, the acquisition of this previous knowledge is of the utmost importance. In the darkness of ignorance, the first dawn of talent appears to be broad day; and the manufacturer of a wig block, who has never seen a higher effort of sculpture, will consider himself a skilful artist. When we have clearly ascertained, by the contemplation of celebrated works, all that the powers of genius have been competent to perform, we see at once what is required of us—we see what is attainable in that which has been attained. We are no longer satisfied with the slow pace of individual progress, but prepare to move on with the great collective mass of talent. The mist of self-delusion is dispelled, and we measure ourselves by a standard that reduces us to our proper dimensions."

We had a few hours to spare the other day in Somersetshire, during the pause of a business, and a good-natured friend who knows we practise what we preach in this respect, and are always anxious to see, however lightly we may be able to profit by what we see,—offered us the means of refreshing our recollections of Chepstow and Tintern. Shakespeare supplied us with an answer,—*"We greet thy love,—not with vain thanks, but with acceptance bounteous, and will upon the instant put thee to it."* And so in half an hour we were off, rattling through part of Gloucestershire to the Aust passage, where a boat took us across the Severn to the Monmouth side, not without convolutions, to avoid the current, sufficient to make a bed of lead, with that the projected bridge here had been carried out. The most difficult part of

such a work would probably be to obtain a sufficient return, in a pecuniary sense, for the money expended.

Chepstow, as most of our readers will recollect, is on the Wye, near where that river enters the Severn, and it is in the close neighbourhood of these two streams which renders the views around so singularly beautiful as they are. That from the Windcliff, for example (justly celebrated), is equal to any thing of its kind in or out of England,—a glorious combination of cliff and cleft, wood and water. There is a natural amphitheatre of hills here, tree-covered, and the Wye steals round the inner circumference; beyond in the Severn, and far away in the distance are the Cotswold hills,—

"Dusk, yet clear;
Mellow'd and mingling, yet distinctly seen."

An extensive view is not without a saddening effect on the mind,—a saddening which chastens. Southey has touched one source of this feeling where he says:—

"When I have gazed
From some high eminence on goodly vales,
And coets, and villages, embowered below,
The thought would rise that all to me was strange
Amid the scene so fair, not one small spot
Where my tired mind might rest and call it
Home!"

Tintern Abbey is about seven miles from Chepstow, also on the Wye, and, like the other Cistercian abbeys, is in a beautiful valley. As Byron says of Newstead,—

"It lies a little low.
Because the monks prefer'd a hill behind,
To shelter their devotion from the wind."

Like all the churches of Cistercian abbeys, Tintern is dedicated to St. Mary, and is in plan a Latin cross. The roof and low tower at the crossing have fallen, but the rest of the building remains in a fair state. The abbey was founded in 1131, but the style of the remains of the church is the Geometrical, or what used to be called Early Decorated, and they are to be ascribed, therefore, to the latter part of the 13th century.* It is all of the same period and accordant; the west window is very beautiful,† and so, indeed, are all the details. It is distressing to see so fine a building roofless and exposed:—

"And questionless here, in these open courts
Which now lie naked to the injuries
Of stormy weather, some men lie interr'd
Who lov'd the church so well and gave so largely
to't."

They thought it would have canopied their bones
Till Doomsday. But all things have an end.
Churches and cities that have diseases like to men
Must have like death that we have."

The east window has disappeared;—as we are in a quoting mood we might say with a poet mentioned just now,—that

"A mighty window, hollow in the centre,
Shorn of its glass of thousand colourings,
Through which the deepened glories once could
enter,
Streaming from off the sun like seraphs' wings,
Now yawns all desolate!"

but if Mr. Sharpe be correct in the remarks made in his recent excellent paper on Furness Abbey,‡ the glass was probably not painted. In many other respects, the asserted characteristics of Cistercian buildings are borne out by Tintern. There are no sculptured figures; and the chapter-house, the refectory, the hospitium, or guest-house, &c., all follow the usual arrangement. The apartment which we suppose to be the hospitium is 85 feet long and 28 feet broad, and has, like that at Furness, a central range of columns to carry the vaulting. The refectory, which is 84 feet long and 34 feet wide, has in the centre of the west side a

vaulted and groined niche, as a reading place about three feet above the floor of the apartment.* The buttery-batch remains. In the north transept of the church, the flight of steps may be seen which communicated with the domestic portions of the establishment, and enabled the monks to visit the church without going into the air.

The width of the nave of the church, inside the walls, with the two aisles, is 75 feet 2 inches; each aisle is exactly half the width of the central space. The whole length of the church, inside, is 223 feet, or three times the width. The transept has an aisle on the east side only (as at Furness, Fountains, and other places), which was formed into chapels. The width of the transept, including the aisle, is 53 feet 10 inches, and the extent from north to south is 151 feet 2 inches, or again nearly three times the width. The church is peculiar in this, that there was a low stone wall connecting the main columns of the nave and chancel, so as to cut off the aisles. The height of the nave to the vaulting was 66 feet, but there was a chamber above this: and the height of the west-front externally is nearly 100 feet.†

A portion of the original tile-paving remains in the south aisle of nave, and includes some very good patterns, most of which, however, have been engraved. It is suffering from weather, and should have a penthouse covering. There are two very interesting crosses, also, just outside the church, which are much injured through lying in a gangway. They are of the fourteenth century: one of them, inscribed, *Jacet Henricus de Lancast grandam abbas de* &c., has a pastoral staff.‡ There are several other monumental slabs scattered about,—further evidences of the wonderful variety with which the mediæval sculptors expressed their one leading idea in such works,—the cross.

Tintern Abbey, as well as Ragland Castle, Chepstow Castle, &c., belongs to the Duke of Beaufort,§ and it is gratifying to learn that his Grace manifests a laudable anxiety for the preservation of these interesting specimens of our ancestors' architectural skill.

Chepstow Castle has several points of interest: the earlier portions of it, including the lower story of what is called the chapel, are of the Norman period, but the insertions and additions of a later date over-ride these. There is an almshouse in the chapel; one of the chimney shafts deserves notice; and the battlements of the keep show carved figures, rising out of the merlons,¶ as at Alwark. The ruins occupy an extensive area, and are situated most picturesquely.

Remembering that Rickman calls Chepstow Church "a very fine specimen of good Norman," we expected more than we found there. And yet Rickman may have been right, for the church has been restored in most prosaic fashion, and now exhibits little to interest the student. It is a cross church of considerable size: the lower part of the tower, Norman in style, is open, and forms a porch to the west entrance. The interior of the church, with its flat drawing-room ceiling, and huge wooden Gothic Norman pulpit, is very unsatisfactory.

* Our readers will remember the pulpit, or reading place, in the refectory at Chester Cathedral, engraved in a previous volume.

† Tintern is very fully and admirably illustrated in Sharpe's "Architectural Parallel." The west entrance to the church is divided into two archways, under a circumscripting arch, and presents in the openwork over the central column, the reverse plan.

‡ These slabs are engraved in Mr. Cress's "Manual for the Study of Sepulchral Slabs."

§ It was granted in the 20th of Henry VIII to Henry, the second Earl of Worcester.

¶ The running parts of a battlement. The spaces are called embrasures, or loops.

* Mass was first celebrated in it in 1288.

† The window is about 40 feet high and 35 feet wide.

‡ See page 423, ante.